

## [From Quarry to Cemetery]

19822

Mary Tomasi

63 Barre St.

Montpelier, Vt. FROM QUARRY TO CEMETERY

"Not I'm not Jose Santos' wife. I only keep the house for him," the woman explained. "Me, I got one husband in Spain." A ghost of humor played around her heavy lips. "Or, maybe I just think I got one. I hear nothing from him now for a year and a half. The big Loyalist he was. All the time talking big Loyalist talk. I know even before he went away that he would get mixed up good in the fighting just as soon as he got to Spain. I know that is what happened to him, there in no other reason why he would not write to me."

She was a small woman in her early forties. A sharply chisled face: thin, pointed nose; high, narrow cheek bones; and black eyes that snapped brightly when she spoke. Her hair was lost from sight under a piece of red cloth wound turban-style around her head.

It was a two-apartment house with a mutual street door, and a hallway that was bare of furniture. The woman pushed open a door to the Santos' living room. Here there was too much furniture. Overstuffed chairs and two davenports lined the walls. A forlorn, skeletonized Christmas tree stood in a corner. Most of the green needles had fallen to the floor.

"Excuse the way I am dressed, and excuse the way the room looks today, I got to clean up all that Christmas stuff. It's a lot of work, but here in America it isn't a Christmas unless you got a Christmas tree. C.3 [??] 2 "In Spain we never had Christmas trees. We give presents, sure, but we don't have them under trees. When we were kids we used to leave

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our shoes; or sometimes the knitted [toques?], beside the fireplace. In the kitchen. Then Christmas morning always we found them full of good things. Always there was a present of clothes. We needed clothes. We were a big family of kids, and new clothes come only at Christmas and on our birthday. My mother used to let us look at our presents early in the morning, so if we had new clothes we could hurry up and dress in them and show them off at the Mass.

"I don't remember one Christmas that my father did not receive many bottles of wine from his friends. He had a good job, like a foreman in the quarries, and all those under him knew he was a good one for wine. I never once saw my father drink water. He used to say that water was all right to wash the outside of the body but not the inside. 'Agua fria sarna oria', he used to say. 'Agua roxa sarna escosca.' It means - Water makes frogs in the belly, wine cures the worms.

"Over there the quarrymen got something more than the Union to hold them together. Each one that works in the quarry is like a brother to the other ones. Every Christmas Eve they make the rounds, they stop for a few minutes at the house of every man who works in the sane quarry. If at one poor house the man cannot give them wine, then they eat the Christmas cake and cookies, and they pull their own bottles of wine from under their coats, and they are all so happy and good natured that even the poor man who is their host 3 cannot feel offended. If a man in hurt in the quarries, a collection is taken up for him, and each one gives a little no matter how poor he is. When I was a little girl my father had two fingers of the left hand crushed by stone. The next day on my way to school I held my head up high in the air, I was so proud. The town was small, and the news that my father was hurt went around quick likes fire. That morning everybody stop me to ask how my father feels. So many stop me that I am late for school. But do you think the teacher cares if I am late? Oh, no, the first thing she says is, 'Poor Irissa, and how is the father this morning?' That teacher was a great one for prayers. She told all the girls (the boys have

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school in another room) she told them to be sure and remember my father in their prayers when they went to bed.

"Poor papa suffered, but the whole family had a good time from his accident. The butcher sent up a long string [?] sausages that papa liked very much but never bought because they were too expensive for a family of eight. The baker, he sent up a box of little crisp buns that we kids were crazy about and that didn't cost him anything because they were made from bits of dough that he would only throw away. The women who lived near us brought roasted meats and even soups. Mama said it was almost as if she was sick in bed herself and not able to get up and cook for her family.

"But we had the bad accidents in those quarries, too. They did not have such good [ways?] to get in and out of the holes like they do here. A cousin of my father was killed 4 in the quarries. He was climbing down the rope ladder that had been hanging from one spot for a long time. So long, that where it rubbed at a sharp rock sticking out from the granite wall, it was worn to a thread. He was the first one to go down that morning. He is down about five steps when crack, crack goes one side of the ladder. His foot slips from the rope and down he goes, falling, rolling, bumping on one sharp rock and another. When he reaches the bottom he is already dead. His head in split open, and his face in so squashed nobody known him, not even his wife. We had a big requiem Mas at his funeral. Five priests sang that Mass. Priests from the other quarry towns nearby."

Irissa poked at the pile of Christmas tree droppings with the tip of her shoe. "Jose Santos has got no small children. He put up a tree so that the children of his brother would come over here. Jose has got only one boy and he is eighteen years old. Jose likes kids. This Christmas he buys everything for his brother's kids, just like they are his own. He is not satisfied with that, he even gives \$10,00 to El Club Espanol, and asks them to buy presents for Spanish kids who are poor. Jose lost his wife when the little boy is only one year old. Lots of people ask me, like you did, if I am Jose Santos' wife." Irissa's black eyes laughed. "That Jose, he eats his supper, he changes his clothes, then I don't see him no

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more until breakfast. Everynight he is down to the beer gardens, or he goes to the Spanish Club. El Club Espanol, that's the name it's got. All the time he drinks and never do I see him drunk. His boy isn't like that 5 Two glasses of wine and he is spinning in the head. Two more and be in really drunk. The boy Joe, he goes to school at the Junior College In Montpelier. Sometimes he will ask his school friends up here; and they have a great time drinking just a little and feeling it a lot. Jose always tells him, 'Look, Joe, it you want to drink, learn first how to drink so you won't make the fool of yourself. Wine has drowned more people than the ocean.'

Steps sounded an the porch. Heavy, pounding steps, as if the newcomer was stamping snow from his feet and at the same time warming them.

"Irissa moved a corner of the curtain, and peered through the half-frosted glass. "Jose," she announced. "It's Jose. I can't get used to his coming home so early in the afternoon. Every year at Christmas they get laid off for a few weeks. In the sheds and in the quarries, too."

Jose was a rugged, ruddy-faced giant. His presence filled the room. Comfortably and pleasantly. Instead of the usual mackinaw or short work coat, he wore a dark blue belted coat, and a gray felt hat. His beard must have been as coal black an the hair above the white of his temples, for even now with his face clean shaven, a deep bluish tinge shaded his cheeks.

"Yes, work in the sheds is slow right now," he admitted. "Too slow. It has been for almost a month. In the spring it'll rush up again, just before Memorial Day.

"The last piece I finished before Christmas was a plain, rough-cut cross. For the Corsi family," he explained to 6 Irissa. "The mother, she wanted a polished cross. One of the boys, he wanted it smooth-surfaced but not polished. The other boy, well he didn't care. So

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after they talked about it and thought about it for a week, the boy who didn't care came up to tell the shed boss that they decided to have it rough-cut.

"A cross cut rough like that is a simple job," Jose continued. "But even an easy job like that has to go through many hands from the time the stone is quarried to the time it is ready to set up in the cemetery.

"Take that cross. Say that our shed gets the contract for it. All right, we put in an order for a block of granite at some quarry. We want a block as near the size of the cross as we can get. The stone is quarried 'dimension stock;' that's the usual stock size and the most popular size. Derricks carry this block to the top of the quarry and then to the surface yards. Here it is marked with red chalk lines to the size the shed has ordered. Drillers bore small, deep holes along these chalk lines with pneumatic drills. Then a 'breaker' comes along with plug wedges which he forces into the holes and which break the stone to the desired size.

"The stone is then put on to a train, a flat-car, and is freighted down the Hill. Railroad tracks usually lead right into a stoneshed, so that it's a simple matter for the shed derrick to hoist the granite from the flat-car and carry it to the marking room.

"Here red chalk is used again. This time, to outline the cross. If it's to be a rough-cut cross, it is cut with a bull sett and hammer, and perhaps finished up in spots with pneumatic tools.

"The cross seems almost finished to you now, no?" Jose asked.

"Well, it isn't. It's got to go through many more hands yet. Suppose you wanted an inscription on the cross. You want it maybe on a small polished surface so it will show up good. When there's just a small surface to be polished it has to be done by hand. The polishing I will explain later -

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“Now we will put the inscription on the cross. First, we have to melt rubber and spread it over the face of the [stone.? ] This hardens immediately. On this the 'sandblasters' outline the inscription you want, and if it's a job of flowers or fancy work they use a pattern to outline the design. Then with small, sharp knives they cut into the design. They cut right through to the granite. Now the stone is put into a dark room called the sandblast room. Here the men have to wear goggles to protect their eyes. A hose is applied to the design. Sand is forced through this hose by air. The pressure of the sand eats into the open design in the rubber, and cuts the inscription or design into the stone. Once in a while a good carver likes to put a finishing touch on the inscription by hand, or with a pneumatic tool.

“Now the stone must be cleaned. An acid is poured over it, then with a brush and fresh water they wash and scrub the stone. They give it a final water rinsing, then the cross is left alone until it is dry. Then it is carefully packed in a crate and shipped to its destination. If the memorial is going to a local cemetery, or to one nearby, the shed takes care of bringing it to the cemetery and setting it up.” Jose smiled, “That's a lot of work for just a rough-cut cross, no?

“But suppose now that this Mrs. Corsi wanted it all smooth and polished like she said at first. That a different job.

“After the granite block comes from the quarry, we take it to the marking room just as we did with the rough cut cross and there it is chalked to the shape of the cross. But this time the cutting isn't done with bull sett and hammer. You want a straight-cut, smooth surface, so it is sawed with an electric carborundum saw. It cuts smoothly and leaves no jagged edges. After the sawing, the stonecutters use air tools on it to give it a hammered finish. Now the stone is ready for the polishing room. Barre granite is fine for polishing. The crystals are small and hard, and take a high polish.

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“The polishing beds hold from seven to eight average size granite pieces. The stones are laid side by side, and cemented together to keep them from moving under the polishing machine. The men make sure that the surfaces of all the stones in the bed are level, one with another. [Than?] the polishing wheels start their work. The wheels lie flat. They are great iron wheels, with a carborundum finish underneath; the circular movement gives the polish. A spray of fine powder and water is kept running on the surface of the stones during the polishing process so that they won't be scratched. Afterwards, the polished stones go through the same scrubbing and cleaning that the rough-cut stone received before being shipped to the buyer.”

Jose Santos grinned. “People complain that granite monuments cost too much. They don't realize all the work that must be done to one before it is ready for the cemetery. Sometime, maybe you will hear some one complain. If you do, then you can do Jose Santos a favor, you can tell him the story about Mrs. Corsi's cross, - from quarry to cemetery.”